

consideration the bill (H.R. 3080) to provide for improvements to the rivers and harbors of the United States, to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, and for other purposes:

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Chair, I rise in support of H.R. 3080, the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA) of 2013. As the Senior Texan on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and cosponsor of this legislation, I am glad to once again be addressing water resources legislation on the House Floor. Such legislation has not been passed by this esteemed Body since 2007, when I served as Chairwoman of the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee that helped craft and usher the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2007 into law over a presidential veto. With this background, I understand the challenge of composing and advancing such legislation to this point. I applaud the leadership demonstrated by the Chairman and Ranking Members of both the Full Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee for bringing this bill to the Floor today.

While I ultimately support the passage of this legislation, I am concerned about the weakening of environmental protections and the ability of the public to participate in that process as a result of the streamlining provisions of this bill. The Army Corps of Engineers project construction backlog and astronomical figure it carries demonstrates that project efficiency must be improved. I understand the desire to expedite Army Corps of Engineers study and project completions, yet do not believe that the environmental safeguards such as the National Environmental Policy Act are the cause of those delays. If properly funded, necessary projects can be completed with appropriate environmental considerations. I am discouraged that environmental protections are being weakened under this guise.

As Co-Chair of the Texas Maritime Caucus, I have supported language in this bill to increase commercial navigation capabilities for Texas' ports and waterways. I am excited about Texas' ports and the role that they play in cultivating the Texas economy, the National economy, and the global economy. With expansive coastlines, established intermodal infrastructure, and strategically beneficial location, maritime commerce has a bright future in Texas. Moreover, the American economy has a brighter future because of Texas' transportation investments and capabilities.

I am glad to have worked in a bipartisan fashion to include language in this legislation for an assessment of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. This assessment will be a valuable tool for the State of Texas to determine its current and future operation and maintenance needs for navigation improvements to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, allowing it to be utilized more efficiently and productively in maritime commerce.

Further, I supported the inclusion of projects at the Sabine-Neches Waterway, Texas and at Freeport Harbor, Texas—both of which are authorized in this legislation. The Sabine-Neches Waterway project will contribute to the economic effectiveness of commercial navigation in a system of navigation channels in the Sabine-Neches estuary of Texas and Louisiana. The Freeport Harbor project provides

for a deep-draft waterway from the Gulf of Mexico to the City of Freeport through the original mouth of the Brazos River. It will contribute to the economic efficiency of commercial navigation in the region and will significantly improve Freeport Harbor's ability to compete in international maritime commerce.

These projects will help bring nearly a billion dollars of Federal funds to Texas' ports and waterways. In turn, these improvements will be a boon for Texas' economy and the National economy. Further, with the expansion of the Panama Canal, these improvements will allow Texas' ports to play an increased role in the global economy. The increased economic benefit and movement of goods will be felt throughout Texas, including in my home district in Dallas, home to two Class One rail lines, an intermodal facility, numerous interstate highways, and a strong consumer marketplace.

It is my hope that the passage of this legislation will revive the biannual WRDA authorization schedule. Monitoring the streamlining provisions of this bill, as well as assessing the expenditures of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund will be ripe for reconsideration during the next Congress—as will many other issues. It is my belief that the overall objectives and purposes of water resources legislation are vital to America and should be considered on a bi-annual basis. The importance of this bill should not be lost in politics.

In closing, I want to once again thank the Chairman and Ranking Members of both the Full Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee for their leadership in advancing this legislation to the floor today.

VULNERABLE VETERANS HOUSING REFORM ACT OF 2013

SPEECH OF

HON. DEREK KILMER

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 28, 2013

Mr. KILMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1742, the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act of 2013.

Our country enjoys unparalleled freedom because of the commitment and sacrifice of our troops. I believe that if you serve our country, we should have your back. That means ensuring that military families and veterans have access to the full level of benefits they have earned.

Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable that the aid and assistance we provide to our heroes and their families, would end up diminishing housing benefits. Treating this allocation as part of the income calculation to determine HUD benefits could lead to an increase in homelessness. Why force our heroes to choose between the care they require and the shelter they need?

H.R. 1742 clarifies that the benefits earned by our military retirees shall remain used to the purposes provided—and that assistance for caring for the disabled shall not jeopardize the ability to get the housing and shelter they require.

Again I am proud to support the Vulnerable Veterans Housing Reform Act of 2013 and urge my colleagues to do the same. Let's con-

tinue our commitment to our veterans. Let us do what we can to honor their service and sacrifices. With more and more servicemen transitioning to veteran status, it's critical that we protect the benefits they have earned in service to their country.

ESTABLISHING COMMISSION OR TASK FORCE TO EVALUATE THE BACKLOG OF DISABILITY CLAIMS

SPEECH OF

HON. LOIS FRANKEL

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, October 28, 2013

Ms. FRANKEL of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the veterans' disability claims backlog is simply unacceptable. American service members who risk their lives to protect our freedoms should not have to wonder if they will receive the basic benefits they deserve. Today, more than 405,000 veterans are waiting for their benefits in this tragically backlogged system. These aren't just numbers. These are real people—heroes who served our country.

Take for example Jeff Colaicovo, a veteran living in my district in South Florida. Jeff received two Purple Hearts for his courageous service during the Vietnam War. He sacrificed for his country, and unbelievably, our claims system failed him.

Until his case was brought to my office's attention earlier this year, Jeff had made little progress towards receiving the benefits he has earned. In fact, he and his wife spent over two years struggling with bills that his benefits should have helped cover. Finally, after reaching out to my office, Jeff began receiving his far-overdue benefits in June. Jeff, along with all of our nation's veterans, deserves better.

Thankfully, today, we took an important step towards helping our veterans by passing H.R. 2189.

Part of the reason veterans often wait so long for their benefits decisions is that the average number of conditions afflicting our veterans has grown significantly. This was true for Jeff whose conditions include PTSD, loss of hearing, irregular heartbeat, and severe back problems. In fact, our service members currently returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan submit an average of 8.5 separate conditions, whereas WWII veterans typically submitted less than three.

Under the current system, each medical condition is individually adjudicated and the veteran only begins receiving benefits once the entire claim has been processed.

H.R. 2189 will address this issue by requiring the Veterans Administration to pay benefits as each element of a veteran's claim is reviewed, rather than when the entire package has been processed. This would allow veterans to begin receiving benefits checks much sooner.

While much more still needs to be done, this is an important step to help repair a broken system.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2013

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, on Monday, October 28, I missed a series of roll-call votes. Had I been present, I would have voted "yea" on Nos. 561 and 562.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE RETIREMENT OF THE HONORABLE JUDGE JOHN D. ALLEN

HON. SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2013

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor and pleasure to extend my personal congratulations and best wishes to a great friend and servant of humankind, Judge John D. Allen, Chief Judge of the Chattahoochee Circuit of the Third Superior Court District of Georgia. Judge Allen will be recognized by the Columbus Bar Association for his distinguished service on Tuesday, October 29, 2013, at the Columbus Convention and Trade Center in Columbus, Georgia. He will be retiring on Thursday, October 31, 2013.

Judge Allen was born on January 17, 1943 in segregated Columbus, Georgia. It seemed like all the odds were against him of one day becoming a Superior Court Judge. Despite the lack of black role models in the law as he was growing up, Judge Allen kept education as his main priority. He graduated from Tuskegee University in 1966 with a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering.

A distinguished cadet in the ROTC, Judge Allen was commissioned into the Air Force in 1966 as a 2nd Lieutenant Pilot. He completed Advanced Survival Training in 1967, and he was promoted to 1st Lieutenant/Tactical Fighter Pilot in 1968. Upon completion of course, he was assigned to Southeast Asia and flew 167 combat missions while stationed in Thailand. After promotions to Tactical Aircraft Commander, then to Captain, Judge Allen flew another 127 combat missions in Southeast Asia before returning to Tampa, Florida and serving as an academic and flight instructor until his discharge in July of 1973. He left the Air Force as a highly decorated pilot, earning 23 Air Medals, 2 Air Force Commendation Medals, and numerous other awards for his service during the Vietnam War.

In 1975, Judge Allen earned a Juris Doctor from the University of Florida. He was admitted to the Georgia bar in 1976. From 1976 to 1987, he maintained a private law practice in the Columbus area. At that time, Judge Allen and I were two of only four black lawyers in Columbus.

Judge Allen continued to break barriers when he began serving as a Columbus Recorder's Court judge for a year before assuming a position on the State Court for Muscogee County in 1987. In 1993, he was appointed to the position of Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge. He has been re-elected repeatedly since his appointment.

Judge Allen's diligent judicial service has also been mirrored by his extensive involve-

ment with the local and state communities. In conjunction with his professional accomplishments in the Air Force and on the bench, Judge Allen has served on a number of boards and commissions, most notably as Chairman of the Judicial Qualifications Commission, and has received many awards and accolades for his service. Judge Allen's contributions to the Columbus area and the state of Georgia have even earned him recognition from the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer as one of "100 People to Remember for the Century."

None of Judge Allen's momentous accomplishments would have been possible without the enduring love and support of his wife Victoria; children John Jr., Geoffrey, and Kevin; and grandchildren John III and Carson.

A true Georgian devoted to serving his great state, Judge Allen embodies Georgia's state motto, "Wisdom, Justice and Moderation." Judge Allen is a man of great integrity who sets a high standard of values that make for a strong foundation of character in himself and in others. On a personal note, I would like to thank Judge Allen for his friendship, advice and counsel over the years. His wisdom and sage advice have contributed immensely to my success. For that I will always be grateful.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me, my wife Vivian, and the more than 700,000 residents of Georgia's Second Congressional District in honoring Judge John D. Allen for his outstanding professional achievements and dedicated service to his country and to the people of the state of Georgia as he retires from his position as Chief Judge of the Chattahoochee Circuit of the Third Superior Court District of Georgia.

WELCOMING GUEST CHAPLIN JACK HIBBS TO U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HON. GARY G. MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2013

Mr. GARY G. MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise to welcome Pastor Jack Hibbs of Calvary Chapel Chino Hills and thank him for delivering today's opening prayer.

I have known Pastor Hibbs for many years through his teaching of the Lord's message. He is best known for his passion, and great ability to incorporate the Lord's word into our everyday lives.

Each week, thousands come together from all over Southern California to hear his sermons. And his radio broadcast is listened to on five continents.

Pastor Hibbs is the author of "Turnaround at Home," a practical guide to inviting God into your home, and creating positive cycles in marriage and parenting. He and his wife, Lisa, share their own experiences and inspiring stories about understanding how emotional, spiritual and social background factors play into families. And how to make changes for good—starting at home.

I thank Pastor Hibbs for what he's done for my community and sharing his time with us today.

CONGRATULATING SAINT LOUIS DE MONTFORT CATHOLIC SCHOOL, A BLUE RIBBON SCHOOL

HON. SUSAN W. BROOKS

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2013

Mrs. BROOKS of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate an outstanding school in my district that is being honored as a 2013 National Blue Ribbon School. It is a pleasure to congratulate Saint Louis de Montfort Catholic School in Fishers, Indiana in celebration of this special occasion.

The National Blue Ribbon designation, given by the U.S. Department of Education, is awarded to both public and private schools across our great nation. Started by President Reagan and given annually since 1982, the award celebrates great American schools that achieve very high learning standards or are making significant improvements in the academic achievements of their students. In my district and across the country, the award recognizes the great educators, students and parents who have worked so hard to ensure Indiana's children reach their full potential and achieve academic success.

For all of these reasons and many more, I am so proud that Saint Louis de Montfort is receiving this prestigious designation. It is a wonderful acknowledgement of the school's commitment to providing young Hoosiers an exceptional education. While 417 schools nationwide may be nominated, only 286 are chosen as a National Blue Ribbon School, making this recognition all the more impressive.

Serving children from junior kindergarten through eighth grade, Saint Louis de Montfort Catholic School provides its students with an outstanding education in both academics and the Catholic faith. It has consistently been graded as an "A" school by the Indiana Department of Education and is a leader in incorporating technology and learning in the classroom, while also engaging its students in daily prayer, religion classes, liturgical celebrations, and service learning projects. As a mother whose children attended Catholic school, I applaud Saint Louis de Montfort for its work to ensure its students engage with the Hoosier community and remain service-oriented.

As a member of the Education and the Workforce Committee, I also want to acknowledge how important it is to our nation's future to encourage and raise a new generation of Americans who have the skills and knowledge to succeed both in and out of the classroom. Students like those at Saint Louis de Montfort give me hope that we will accomplish this vital mission. Their outstanding work is an inspiration to students, educators and parents across the nation. Once again, congratulations to Saint Louis de Montfort. I am very proud of you.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ALLYSON Y. SCHWARTZ

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2013

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 562 I was unable to be present for the vote on H.R. 2011.